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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [KPKO](#) [UNSC](#) [SY](#) [IS](#) [LE](#)
SUBJECT: UNIFIL COMMANDER GRAZIANO MAINTAINS THAT SOUTH
LEBANON IS UNDER CONTROL

Classified By: Ambassador Alejandro D. Wolff, per 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) During consultations in New York September 4-7 with the UN, troop contributing countries (TCC), members of the Security Council, and other interested delegations, UNIFIL Force Commander Graziano declared that Hizballah's arms pose the greatest threat to stability in Lebanon. But he maintained that Hizballah has chosen to remain "inactive" in south Lebanon for domestic political reasons and to avoid antagonizing the EU. Graziano pledged to act on specific intelligence regarding unauthorized armed elements in UNIFIL's AOR but said he had yet to receive such reports. He agreed that UNIFIL should establish checkpoints along the Litani river co-located with those of the LAF. Asked how the U.S. could help support UNIFIL, Graziano urged continued support for the LAF, U.S. pressure on Israel to withdraw from the northern part of Ghajjar as part of an agreement with UNIFIL and the LAF, and support for UNIFIL's effort to physically mark the location of the Blue Line. End Summary.

¶2. (U) UNIFIL Force Commander, Italian Major General Claudio Graziano, met Amb Wolff on September 6. UNIFIL political affairs officer Cornelia Frank also attended, as did USUN military advisor and poloff (notetaker). Graziano also briefed a formal meeting of UNIFIL troop contributing countries on September 7 and held meetings with other interested delegations from September 4-7.

Amb Wolff Describes Risks to 1701

¶3. (C) Amb Wolff praised UNIFIL's performance and success thus far, but noted that the strategic environment in Lebanon remains highly unstable because of Hizballah's failure to disarm. Not only do Hizballah's weapons threaten regional stability, they also affect domestic Lebanese politics. Syria and Iran also continue to illegally transfer arms into Lebanon, in defiance of UNSCR 1701. Amb Wolff noted that some believe UNIFIL's presence in south Lebanon has just shifted Hizballah's activities northwards and masked the continuing instability. In this situation, UNIFIL's efforts in south Lebanon must be above reproach. All reports of the presence of unauthorized armed elements or weapons in south Lebanon must be thoroughly investigated and addressed. Amb Wolff also underscored the importance of quickly establishing co-located UNIFIL and LAF checkpoints along the Litani river to guard against infiltration of weapons into south Lebanon.

Hizballah Weapons Main Threat

¶4. (C) Graziano agreed that Hizballah's arms are the "most important problem" facing Lebanon, adding that LAF Commander Suleiman had told him the same thing, but he insisted that this issue could only be addressed through the political process. Disarming Hizballah by force, he asserted, "would take a level of violence that would lead to civil war" --

something even Israel did not attempt during its twenty-year occupation of southern Lebanon. Graziano said he was not sure what was happening north of the Litani river, since that is outside UNIFIL's AOR, but he suggested that Hizballah does not want a new war with Israel now. He agreed that UNIFIL had to be present at the Litani river to guard against weapons infiltration into south Lebanon, and reported that he had recently sent a letter to LAF Commander Suleiman and GOL Defense Minister Murr seeking to set up co-located UNIFIL and LAF checkpoints along the river. Graziano added that he would prefer to have UNIFIL's area of operations expanded near al-Qulay'ah to increase the buffer between the Litani river and the Blue Line. Frank later clarified to USUN that Graziano did not ask the SYG to request a geographic expansion of UNIFIL's mandate from the UNSC because of the political sensitivity of that issue in Lebanon.

But No Signs of Refortification in AOR

15. (C) Graziano asserted that Hizballah has decided to remain inactive in south Lebanon, primarily to keep the focus on the political crisis in Beirut and the upcoming presidential elections, but also to avoid a confrontation with European troops in UNIFIL that could lead the EU to brand Hizballah a terrorist organization. He said he had asked Israel for evidence to the contrary, specifically reports that Hizballah was moving its weapons and command facilities into villages to avoid detection by UNIFIL, but had not received anything yet. (Note: The Israeli Mission told USUN that Graziano had asked them to urge the IDF to share its intelligence and promised that UNIFIL would take action in response. End Note.) Graziano maintained that UNIFIL should always try to act with the LAF to investigate reports of unauthorized armed

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elements in the AOR lest the Lebanese begin to distrust the UN. In a separate meeting with Poloffs, Frank clarified that UNIFIL has taken and would continue to take independent action to address threats in its AOR if the LAF is for some reason unable or unwilling to act.

How U.S. Can Help UNIFIL

16. (C) Asked how the U.S. could support UNIFIL, Graziano identified the three priorities below. It initially appeared notable that he did not raise the UN's request that Israel provide strike data on its use of cluster bombs, given the emphasis placed on this issue by UN officials in New York, but he later explained that he did not think the IDF would provide this information due to concerns he could appreciate.

-- Support the LAF: Although the LAF performed admirably in the fight against Fatah al-Islam, Graziano described its current state as "miserable." He praised ongoing U.S. military assistance to the LAF but underscored the importance of convincing Israel that it is in Israel's interests to have a strong LAF, as well.

-- Ghajjar: Recalling the history of the village of Ghajjar, which now straddles the Blue Line and whose inhabitants were originally Syrian but now hold Israeli passports, Graziano said the fact that Israel had not yet withdrawn from the part of the village inside Lebanon is a "blatant violation" of UNSCR 1701 and could become a flashpoint in Lebanon. Surmising that the IDF is more reluctant to withdraw from Ghajjar than Israel's political leadership, Graziano appealed to the U.S. to urge the GOI to support a UN solution to this issue -- which would establish temporary security arrangements for the villagers in Ghajjar acceptable to both Israel and Lebanon. He also suggested that visible progress in dealing with this issue could help deflect attention from Sheba'a Farms issue.

-- Marking the Blue Line: Graziano said this process has

begun but appealed for more help from both Israel and Lebanon to accelerate the effort. During the TCC meeting, Graziano expressed optimism this project would be completed by the end of 2007. But he expressed concern to Amb Wolff that the two sides might bicker about the exact location of the Blue Line in certain parts and such disputes would slow the effort down considerably.

Comment: Graziano Gets High Marks

17. (C) Both TCCs and DPKO officers told USUN that they have been very impressed with Graziano thus far in his tenure. His political advisor, Cornelia Frank, asserted that in her view Graziano would not hesitate to respond aggressively if he judged either UNIFIL or stability in the AOR is threatened. The Israeli Mission was similarly pleased after its meeting with him. Even though he discounted Israeli reports of Hizballah rearmament in south Lebanon, the Israelis expressed appreciation that Graziano took their concerns seriously and pledged to act on any specific intelligence. The Israelis favorably contrasted Graziano's approach with those of the German and Italian DPRs, who recently told a visiting Israeli delegation that everything is fine in south Lebanon and that Israel should not suggest otherwise.
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